

Back Again, Back Again: Longings

[**FX:** voices chatter in the background. Music begins, a simple repeating pattern, bright and cheery. It is "Nightingales" by Pierce Murphy.]

Abigail, as the intro: Back Again, Back Again, episode ten: longings.

[**FX:** Music fades out. A click of a cassette tape-style recorder turns on, and the machine begins to whirr underneath the rest of the audio.]

Ilyaas: Here's something Peter, Edmund, Susan, and Lucy never tell you at the end of Narnia: Spending your life in another land, growing old and gaining muscle and scars and a body foreign from that of your childhood and then reverting back to a form you once were more than sucks.

I suppose it could be worse. Lucy was eight.

Eight. Can you imagine that? Eight years old and you spend your entire life in Narnia -- you get a period and become a woman and deal with growing pains and teenage hormones and growing old, seeing gray hair and coming into your knowledge -- and then a stag tricks you through a wardrobe and you're still forty-eight or whatever the hell in your mind but now you're four feet tall again and no one would ever think about taking you seriously.

Lucy got a trip to Narnia -- she got two lives -- but she got *fucked*, and no one wants to talk about it.

I've spent a lot of hours scrolling through tumblr theories about Narnia, about how Edmund must've missed his old life where he was a king and how Susan chose to forget, to pretend it all a

childhood make-believe because that was easier than confronting everything she'd lost.

How did they not become bitter, at this place that spit them back out? That used them for everything and then took it all away? How did they go back so willingly, knowing it would be ripped from them again?

I suppose it's because they missed the magic. I suppose it's because it hurt them to be away from it all.

(Silence.)

Every time I look in the mirror I'm shocked. It's not just that I'm younger, but -- I'm softer. Places that used to be ribs and muscle and scars aren't anything at all. We were in theatre class and I was helping move set pieces and I forgot how much I'd lost -- for a moment, all I could feel was shock as the column didn't shift.

It's just -- I just -- feel -- cheated?

But you don't care about that. Of course I do -- but you don't want to hear me complain.

Where was I?

The raid. I'd gotten stabbed. We made it back to the castle and I scrubbed off the gold paint and the next morning they checked my shoulder, the physician asking me if I'd put the salve on the wound that he'd sent to Rhia. I said yes, and asked him to be careful, but as he unwrapped the bandages we found the cut looking like it had happened months ago. The physician looked shocked. *Magic?* He'd said, but it had sounded more like a question. *Is it magic?*

I don't know, I'd responded, even though I'd guessed it was. My wound with Cassian hadn't healed even close to this quickly, but I hadn't disappeared someone right afterwards -- hadn't tapped into that power so it could help me in return. *Maybe it's the salve?* I asked hesitantly.

It wasn't. It was the magic.

He pronounced me capable of fighting again, so I was right back into the training of the last few weeks. Cassian and I ran laps until I dry-heaved into the bushes. He made fun of my swordplay even though, hell-o, I'd *gotten stabbed* the day before. Rhia spent hours teaching me letters and words in Rhysean, as the afternoon stretched into the evening. It wasn't until I came down for dinner and found the other three all seated before me -- not unusual -- with matching expressions -- unusual -- that the change I'd felt in the air the night before came into being.

The queen stared at me from her end of the table. I hadn't even been late -- the other three just seemed to be early, wanting to have discussed something before I made my appearance. She dragged the tines of her fork across her plate, a studied air of noncommitment surrounding the way she moved.

Cassian told a different story. He was on edge -- just enough to make me nervous. He glanced at his mother the king, several times, before she finally opened her mouth to speak.

You've proven to be a liability on the field of battle, she said, her words clipped and formal. She didn't look at me as she talked, still drawing the tines of her fork through the dressing on her plate, but the English alone -- much less the context -- was enough to let me know this statement was addressed to me.

I swallowed and tried not to feel shamed -- even though it had barely been a month, even though I hadn't seen her raise a sword once. *I know, king. I'm sorry.*

You are meant to be the soldier.

Cassian shot me a look -- pleading, apologetic. This was not the first time his mother had discussed her displeasure in me. This was not the first time that I had wanted to say something snarky in return -- which I always did, exaggeratedly,

to Cassian long after the conversation had ended and I'd been docile to the queen, tame and malleable.

I know, king. I'm sorry.

How do you spend your days? She asked, noncommittally, and Cassian opened his mouth to respond. She silenced him with half a stare, ice-cold, and continued dragging her fork along her plate. *I asked the Eligida.*

That was another thing. She had never used my name -- it was always *Eligida* or, if with Cassian's name in the conversation, too, *soldat* -- soldier.

Well, Eligida?

Training with your son, King. And learning letters with Rhia -- with the Menstrana de Eligida.

She said something, low and sharp, in Rhysean. Cassian muttered a response, the sort of harried *I know* I'd heard fall from his lips so many times before. She repeated it, louder, in English. *She should be doing more.*

Yes, mother, Cassian said. And then, with a look that told me the English was for my sake, he continued: *but if you put her into court with all the rest, she'll never learn to fight --*

-- She would make appearances, which would make her good for something, the queen snapped. She fixed her gaze on me.

We believe, she said, nodding to the king on the other end of the table -- who nodded, hastily, having zoned out of the conversation some time before -- *that you should make a bigger show of your place here. Though my son disagrees,* she said, casting her stare to Cassian.

I -- I don't believe I quite understand, king, I hedged, for Cassian had bounced the word *court* around as if it was meant to give me clarity, but I hardly ever knew, with these kings.

My son insists you cannot fight, she cut in, and Cassian winced at her wording. *So if you're not to go out to show the*

people what we own, then you shouldn't spend your days locked in a room with a tutor or behind the Enarbol with my son.

She fixed Cassian with a look. We have an arena. Your soldiers wait for you, there.

Let me fit that in, he snapped, exasperated, among training the Eligida and learning to run a country --

The queen released a long string of venomous words in Rhysean. Cassian apologized, quietly, his lip curling just enough to let me know I wouldn't be the only one ranting about the queen later.

Come to court, she said to me. My son can have you for the mornings -- in the arena, not hidden in the garden -- and you will join us in the afternoons. It will do you as much good to learn language there as in a dusty room.

There was no please in her sentence, no if you'd like. So I said yes, king, because that was all there was to say.

[**FX:** The whirr of the cassette machine fades out. "Nightingales" once more fades in, just as cheerfully.]

Abigail, as the outro: Back Again, Back Again is written and produced by me, Abigail Eliza. If you'd like to hear more about the show, visit us on Twitter, Instagram, or Tumblr @backagainpodcast or on Tik Tok @abigailelizawrites. Our outro music is Nightingales by Pierce Murphy from the album To Japan, and is licensed under an Attribution License. The song was retrieved from FreeMusicArchive.org. Visit the description of this episode for full copyright information and a link to the

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If you've made it this far, thanks for sticking around. You are important in this world and have a role no one else can fill. You are loved. I hope you have a wonderful day.